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FOR NEA/ARP:AMACDONALD AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: SALEH BIG WINNER IN YEMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY  
ELECTIONS DELAY

REF: A. SANAA 331  
[1](#)B. SANAA 430

Classified By: CDA Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

#### Summary

[1](#)1. (U) A February 26 decision by Yemen's Parliament is expected to lead to a two year delay of the parliamentary elections scheduled for April 27. This message examines what that delay will actually mean. The delay is seen by some as a chance for true reform of Yemen's political system. Judging by the inactivity of the key players since the decision, however, it is more likely to mean two more years of GPC control and the same problems being faced in 2011 that Yemen is facing now. By avoiding an election without opposition participation, President Saleh dodged a flashpoint that could have ignited simmering anti-regime unhappiness, and made himself the only real winner. End Summary.

#### In a Legal Sense

[1](#)2. (C) In a legal sense, the election delay means nothing because it hasn't legally happened yet. Instead, the parliament has agreed to consider extending its term for two years. The issue has been referred to a special committee who will examine it for sixty days and then report to the main body of the Parliament who will then vote on it. Extending Parliament's term will de facto delay the elections for two years. Failure to extend the term means it will end on April 27. This seems an unlikely outcome. As Secretary General Yassin Saeed Noman of the opposition Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) told POL/E Chief on March 18, "believe me, the Parliamentarians will not vote against two more years in office."

#### In a Political Sense

[1](#)3. (C) In a political sense, the two year delay would give both the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) much needed breathing space. As Secretary General Hasan Zaid of JMP member party al-Haq told POLOFF in February, "When a student has not done his homework, he welcomes a long delay of the exam." (ref A) Distracted by verbal wrangling with the GPC and threatening to boycott the election, the JMP member parties did not lay solid groundwork for the elections. If they were to take place on time the opposition would find itself unprepared and, in many cases, with its supporters not registered to vote. The GPC also benefited from the delay by avoiding the prospect of going into elections at a time when opposition to the government is strong in both the south and extreme north of the country.

¶4. (C) The agreement signed by the parties (text para. 10) gives three specific reasons for the delay: 1) to give the parties and civil society the opportunity to discuss constitutional amendments for the development of political and electoral systems; 2) to enable political parties to complete discussion of electoral law amendments; and 3) to reform the Supreme Committee for Elections and Referenda (SCER). In a best case scenario, with all parties working in good faith toward these goals, Yemen could, by 2011, have an electoral system vastly superior to the current one, with buy-in from all main parties. Further, according to Country Director Peter Williams of the International Federation of Electoral Systems (IFES), some parties are talking about including in the discussion a constitutional amendment transforming Yemen's appointed Shoura Council into an elected body, thereby giving Yemen an entirely elected bicameral legislature.

¶5. (C) In reality, however, neither the GPC nor the JMP have shown any movement on the issues outlined in the agreement. National Democratic Institute (NDI) Country Director Heather Therrien told POL/E Chief on March 17 that she presses the parties regularly on these issues, but neither side has made any progress except for the JMP, who formed a technical committee. Likewise, the work of the SCER commissioners has ground to a standstill. SCER Commissioner Jafer Ba Salah told POL/E Chief on March 18 that he has not even bothered to go to his office since the February 26 agreement. (Note: Ba Salah implied that he saw no reason to go to work until the SCER is reformed. End Note.)

¶6. (C) While two years is a long time to delay elections, it is not a long time to achieve the goals set out by the agreement. Williams estimates that implementing any major reforms in the political system will require at least 12 months for the SCER to retool its operations, retrain its staff and train voters. This means that reforms will need to be in place by April 2010. Noman estimates that the required amendments to the constitution will take an additional six to nine months to hammer out. This leaves only three to six months for the parties to agree on how to reform the SCER and enact amendments to the electoral law. This should be enough time, but only if all parties to the discussion work seriously and no major roadblocks arise.

To Saleh  
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¶7. (C) Ironically, considering how loudly his party rejected the delay during negotiations, President Saleh is its biggest beneficiary. The Saleh regime is facing a potential sixth war with the al-Houthis in Sa'ada, a burgeoning separatist movement in the southern governorates (ref B), and increasing al-Qaeda activity throughout the country, including in the capital. At the same time, declining oil revenues have forced the ROYG to implement stern austerity measures. Vice President Mohamed Saleh Tammah of the National Conference of Sons of the South, an umbrella group of southern secessionists who have formed a shadow government across Yemen's southern governorates, told POLOFF in March that some military units in the southern governorates have not been paid for months. (Note: Post has been unable to verify Tammah's story. End Note.) The convergence of these stressors creates an environment where observers fear that a small spark could ignite a "perfect storm," shaking the Saleh regime. Holding parliamentary elections without the participation of the opposition would threaten to be just such a spark. By avoiding an election without the opposition, Saleh dodged this flashpoint, giving him time to defuse one or more of the underlying stressors.

To the People of Yemen  
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18. (C) The Yemeni people will be the biggest losers in the election delay. They will be denied the opportunity to change their representatives. In effect, the ruling GPC has received the gift of two more years of complete domination of the ROYG. While it probably would have retained control of the Parliament in any case, delaying the elections forestalls any kind of accountability to the voters. Even worse, with political reform still the main topic of discussion between the GPC and the JMP, there is no pressure on the ROYG to address the real issues facing the Yemeni people. Williams complained to POL/E Chief, "They will be talking about this (electoral reform) for the next two years. That's two years in which they won't be talking about the economy, the oil running out, education and health care."

Comment  
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19. (C) An optimist might look at the elections delay and see a chance for the parties to work together to forge an improved political system in Yemen. More jaded observers, including post, see a chance for Yemen's politicians to fritter away two more years and face exactly the same issues in 2011 that they face now. Without continual pressure from donor countries, there is no reason to believe that Yemen's political parties will make productive use of this opportunity. The only real winner appears to be President Saleh, who dodged a bullet that had the potential to stir up considerable unrest. End Comment.

110. (U) Begin Text of Agreement to delay elections.

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

After dialogues called for and sponsored by brother/President Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of Republic, which included representatives of the General People,s Congress, and the Joint Meeting Parties represented in parliament.

In view of what the supreme national interest calls for, and being keen to hold free, safe, and impartial parliamentary elections in suitable political environments that will allow all parties in the political arena to participate in, the undersigned find it necessary to work on making the required constitutional arrangements to amend Article 65 of the Constitution which is related to the period of Parliament so  
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as to allow for the extension of the present council for another two years. This is due to the lack of sufficient time to perform the following necessary reforms:

First: allow political parties and organizations and non-government organizations to discuss the Constitutional Amendments for the development of political and electoral systems including the Ratio List.

Second: Enabling representatives of political parties in Parliament to complete the discussion of issues that were not agreed upon during the preparation of electoral law amendments, and including what is agreed upon in the heart of the law.

Third: Reform the Supreme Committee for Elections and Referendum (SCER) based on the contents of the law.

For General People,s Congress, Signed, Abdulkareem Al-Iryani

For Yemen Congregation for Reform (Islah), Signed, (Name not clear)

For Yemen Socialist Party, Signed (Name not clear)

For People,s Nasserite Union Organization Signed (Name not clear)

For Arab Socialist Baath Signed, Dr. Abdulwahab Mahmood  
Abdulhameed

End Text.  
BRYAN